



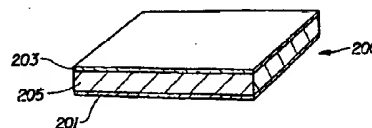
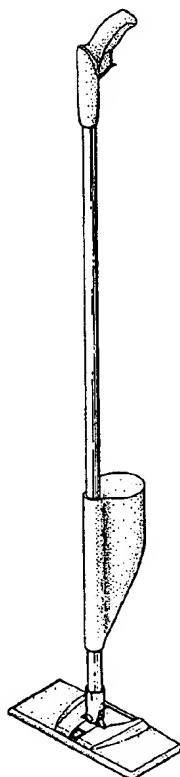
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(54) Title: A CLEANING IMPLEMENT HAVING CONTROLLED FLUID ABSORBENCY

(57) Abstract

Disclosed is a cleaning implement comprising a handle and a removable cleaning pad (200, 305, 400, 560, 600, 700). The cleaning pad exhibits a controlled rate of fluid absorbency, which allows for beneficial cleaning without using large quantities of fluid. Also disclosed is a method for cleaning hard surface comprising the use of low levels of cleaning solution.



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A CLEANING IMPLEMENT HAVING CONTROLLED FLUID ABSORBENCY

TECHNICAL FIELD

This application relates to a cleaning implement useful in removing soils from hard surfaces. The application particularly relates to a cleaning implement comprising a handle and a removable absorbent cleaning pad. The application also relates to the absorbent cleaning pad that is useful with the cleaning implement. The cleaning pad exhibits the ability to absorb fluids at a controlled rate, and retain those absorbed fluid during the cleaning process.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The literature is replete with products capable of cleaning hard surfaces such as ceramic tile floors, hardwood floors, counter tops and the like. In the context of cleaning floors, numerous devices are described comprising a handle and some means for absorbing a fluid cleaning composition. Such devices include those that are reusable, including mops containing cotton strings, cellulose and/or synthetic strips, sponges, and the like. While these mops are successful in removing many soils from hard surfaces, they typically require the inconvenience of performing one or more rinsing steps during use to avoid saturation of the material with dirt, soil, etc., residues. These mops therefore require the use of a container to perform the rinsing step(s) to refresh the implement, and typically these rinsing steps fail to sufficiently remove dirt residues. This may result in redeposition of significant amounts of soil during subsequent passes of the mop. Furthermore, as reusable mops are used over time, they become increasingly soiled and malodorous. This negatively impacts subsequent cleaning performance.

To alleviate some of the negative attributes associated with reusable mops, attempts have been made to provide mops having disposable cleaning pads. For example, U.S. Patent No. 5,094,559, issued March 10, 1992 to Rivera et al., describes a mop that includes a disposable cleaning pad comprising a scrubber layer for removing soil from a soiled surface, a blotter layer to absorb fluid after the cleaning process, and a liquid impervious layer positioned between the scrubber and blotter layer. The pad further contains a rupturable packet means positioned between the scrubber layer and the liquid impervious layer. The rupturable packets are so located such that upon rupture, fluid is directed onto

the surface to be cleaned. During the cleaning action with the scrubber layer, the impervious sheet prevents fluid from moving to the absorbent blotter layer. After the cleaning action is completed, the pad is removed from the mop handle and reattached such that the blotter layer contacts the floor. While this device may alleviate the need to use multiple rinsing steps, it does require that the user physically handle the pad and reattach a soiled, damp pad in order to complete the cleaning process.

Similarly, U.S. Patent 5,419,015, issued May 30, 1995 to Garcia, describes a mop having removable, washable work pads. The pad is described as comprising an upper layer which is capable of attaching to hooks on a mop head, a central layer of synthetic plastic microporous foam, and a lower layer for contacting a surface during the cleaning operation. The lower layer's composition is stated to depend on the end-use of the device, i.e., washing, polishing or scrubbing. While the reference addresses the problems associated with mops that require rinsing during use, the patent fails to provide a cleaning implement that sufficiently removes the soil that is deposited on typical household hard surfaces, in particular floors, such that the surface is perceived as essentially free of soil.

In particular, the synthetic foam described by Garcia for absorbing the cleaning solution has a relatively low absorbent capacity for water and water-based solutions. As such, the user must either use small amounts of cleaning solution so as to remain within the absorbent capacity of the pad, or the user must leave a significant amount of cleaning solution on the surface being cleaned. In either situation, the overall performance of the cleaning pad is not optimal.

While many known devices for cleaning hard surfaces are successful at removing a vast majority of the soil encountered by the typical consumer during the cleaning process, they are inconvenient and time consuming in that they require one or more cleaning/rinsing steps. The prior art devices that have addressed the issue of convenience and time savings typically do so at the cost of cleaning performance. As such, there remains a need for a device that offers both convenience and beneficial soil removal. Therefore, it is an object of the present invention to provide a cleaning implement that comprises a removable cleaning pad, which alleviates the need to rinse the pad during use and provides a substantially dry result. In particular, it is an object of the present invention to provide an implement that comprises a removable cleaning pad with sufficient absorbent capacity, on a gram of absorbed fluid per gram of cleaning pad basis, that allows the cleaning of a large area, such as that of the typical hard surface floor (e.g., 80-100 ft²), without the need to refresh or change the pad. It is a further object to provide such a cleaning implement where the pad offers beneficial soil removal properties. Where the cleaning implement of the present invention is used in combination with a cleaning solution, it is a further object to provide a substantially dry end result.

The implement of the present invention is designed to be compatible with all hard surface substrates, including wood, vinyl, linoleum, no wax floors, ceramic, Formica®, porcelain, glass, wall board, and the like.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a cleaning implement comprising:

- a. a handle; and
- b. a removable cleaning pad having an average absorbency rate of deionized water of not more than about 0.5 g/sec, when measured from $t=0$ to $t=1200$ seconds using the Performance Under Pressure method; and a t_{1200} absorbent capacity of at least about 1 g deionized water per g of the cleaning pad, when measured using the Performance Under Pressure method.

While not limited to wet cleaning applications, the present invention is preferably used in combination with a cleaning solution. That is, while the implement initially exists in a dry state, optimal cleaning performance for typical hard surface cleaning will involve the use of a cleaning fluid that is applied to the soiled surface prior to cleaning with the present implement. During the effort to develop the present cleaning implement, Applicants discovered that, surprisingly, a critical aspect of cleaning performance is the ability to control the rate of fluid absorbence by the cleaning pad. That is, while it is important to absorb essentially all of the fluid cleaning solution during the time in which a typical user will clean a surface, it is also important to avoid rapid absorption by the cleaning pad. This is generally counter to the teachings of the prior art pertaining to absorbent articles, where it is accepted that immediate, rapid absorbency is desired.

Avoiding rapid absorption allows the cleaning solution to be used most efficiently in emulsifying, diluting and transporting soil into the pad. In this regard, the cleaning implement of the present invention allows for the cleaning of hard surfaces using low levels of cleaning solution, relative to the levels of solution required using prior cleaning devices. This provides numerous benefits, including a reduction in the cost of cleaning solution needed to perform the cleaning operation. Applicants have found that by utilizing a cleaning pad that has controlled absorbency, excellent cleaning results can be achieved using solution levels of not more than about 6 ml of cleaning solution per square foot of area to be cleaned, while at the same time providing a pad with sufficiently high absorbent capacity to provide a substantially dry end result. Without intending to be bound by theory, it is postulated that the controlled rate provided by the cleaning pad of the present invention allows an effective fluid reservoir to exist in contact with the floor, which assists in diluting and transporting soil into the pad, using less supplemental fluid volumes than required by

prior cleaning systems. As such, the present invention further relates to a method for cleaning a hard surface using low levels of a cleaning solution, the method comprising:

- (i) applying the cleaning solution to the hard surface to be cleaned at a level of not more than about 6 ml of cleaning solution per square foot of hard surface; and
- (ii) wiping the hard surface with a cleaning implement comprising:
 - a. a handle; and
 - b. a removable cleaning pad having a t_{1200} absorbent capacity of at least about 1 g deionized water per g of the cleaning pad.

Preferably, the method will utilize from about 0.5 to about 6 ml of cleaning solution per square foot of hard surface, more preferably from about 2 to about 4 ml per square foot. Preferably, the method will involve the use of a cleaning pad having a t_{1200} absorbent capacity of at least about 5 g/g, more preferably at least about 10 g/g, still more preferably at least about 20 g/g, and still more preferably at least about 30 g/g. It should be understood that the method is also extendible to the use of the cleaning pad as a stand alone product (i.e., with no handle).

In addition to having the requisite controlled rate of absorbency, it is still important that the cleaning pad have the ability to absorb most of the fluid utilized. In this respect, a minimal overall absorbency is a requisite of the cleaning pad. This overall absorbency is also important in that it allows for the use of sufficient quantities of cleaning solution (to maximize solution-soil interaction) and ensures that essentially all of the solution and solubilized soil is removed from the surface.

The handle useful in the present invention will optionally comprise at one end a pivotably attached support head. The removable cleaning pad preferably comprises:

- i. a scrubbing layer;
- ii. an absorbent layer which is preferably in direct fluid communication with the scrubbing layer; and
- iii. an optional attachment layer for releasably attaching the cleaning pad to the handle, preferably to the handle's optional support head.

The present invention further relates to a method of cleaning a hard surface comprising the step of wiping the surface with an implement or pad of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

Figure 1 is a perspective view of a cleaning implement of the present invention which has an on-board fluid dispensing device.

Figure 1a is a perspective view of a cleaning implement of the present invention which does not have an on-board fluid dispensing device.

Figure 1b is a side view of the handle grip of the implement shown in Figure 1a.

Figure 2 is a perspective view of a removable cleaning pad of the present invention.

Figure 3 is a blown perspective view of the absorbent layer of a removable cleaning pad of the present invention.

Figure 4 is a cross-sectional view of one embodiment of a removable cleaning pad of the present invention.

Figure 5 represents a schematic view of an apparatus for measuring the Performance Under Pressure (PUP) capacity of the removable cleaning pad.

Figure 6 represents an enlarged sectional view of the piston/cylinder assembly shown in Figure 5.

Figure 7 represents a blown perspective view of another removable cleaning pad of the present invention.

Figure 8 represents a perspective view of another removable cleaning pad of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

I. Definitions

As used herein, the term "comprising" means that the various components, ingredients, or steps, can be conjointly employed in practicing the present invention. Accordingly, the term "comprising" encompasses the more restrictive terms "consisting essentially of" and "consisting of."

As used herein, the term "direct fluid communication" means that fluid can transfer readily between two cleaning pad components or layers (e.g., the scrubbing layer and the absorbent layer) without substantial accumulation, transport, or restriction by an interposed layer. For example, tissues, nonwoven webs, construction adhesives, scrim and the like may be present between the two distinct components while maintaining "direct fluid communication", as long as they do not substantially impede or restrict fluid as it passes from one component or layer to another.

As used herein, the term "Z-dimension" refers to the dimension orthogonal to the length and width of the cleaning pad of the present invention, or a component thereof. The Z-dimension usually corresponds to the thickness of the cleaning pad or a pad component.

As used herein, the term "X-Y dimension" refers to the plane orthogonal to the thickness of the cleaning pad, or a component thereof. The X and Y dimensions usually correspond to the length and width, respectively, of the cleaning pad or a pad component.

As used herein, the term "layer" refers to a member or component of a cleaning pad whose primary dimension is X-Y, i.e., along its length and width. It should be understood that the term layer is not necessarily limited to single layers or sheets of material. Thus the layer can comprise laminates or combinations of several sheets or webs of the requisite type of materials. Accordingly, the term "layer" includes the terms "layers" and "layered."

As used herein, the term "hydrophilic" is used to refer to surfaces that are wettable by aqueous fluids deposited thereon. Hydrophilicity and wettability are typically defined in terms of contact angle and the surface tension of the fluids and solid surfaces involved. This is discussed in detail in the American Chemical Society publication entitled Contact Angle, Wettability and Adhesion, edited by Robert F. Gould (Copyright 1964), which is hereby incorporated herein by reference. A surface is said to be wetted by a fluid (i.e., hydrophilic) when either the contact angle between the fluid and the surface is less than 90°, or when the fluid tends to spread spontaneously across the surface, both conditions normally co-existing. Conversely, a surface is considered to be "hydrophobic" if the contact angle is greater than 90° and the fluid does not spread spontaneously across the surface.

As used herein, the term "scrim" means any durable material that provides texture to the surface-contacting side of the cleaning pad's scrubbing layer, and also has a sufficient degree of openness to allow the requisite movement of fluid to the absorbent layer of the cleaning pad. Suitable materials include materials that have a continuous, open structure, such as synthetic and wire mesh screens. The open areas of these materials may be readily controlled by varying the number of interconnected strands that comprise the mesh, by controlling the thickness of those interconnected strands, etc. Other suitable materials include those where texture is provided by a pattern printed on a substrate. In this aspect, a durable material (e.g., synthetic or resin) may be printed on a substrate in a continuous or discontinuous pattern, such as individual dots, brush-like filaments (e.g., flocking) and/or lines, to provide the requisite texture. Similarly, the continuous or discontinuous pattern may be printed onto a release material that will then act as the scrim. These patterns may be repeating or they may be random. It will be understood that one or more of the approaches described for providing the desired texture may be combined to form the optional scrim material. The Z-direction height and open area of the scrim and or scrubbing substrate layer assist in controlling (i.e., slowing) the rate of flow of liquid into the absorbent core material. The Z-dimension, or height, of the scrim and/or scrubbing layer help provide a means of controlling the volume of liquid in contact with the cleaning surface while at the same time controlling the rate of liquid absorption into the absorption core material.

For purposes of the present invention, an "upper" layer of a cleaning pad is a layer that is relatively further away from the surface that is to be cleaned (i.e., in the implement context, relatively closer to the implement handle during use). The term "lower" layer conversely means a layer of a cleaning pad that is relatively closer to the surface that is to be cleaned (i.e., in the implement context, relatively further away from the implement handle during use). As such, the scrubbing layer is the lower-most layer and the absorbent layer is an upper layer relative to the scrubber layer. The terms "upper" and "lower" are similarly used when referring to layers that are multi-ply (e.g., when the scrubbing layer is a two-ply material).

All percentages, ratios and proportions used herein are by weight unless otherwise specified.

II. Cleaning Implements

The cleaning implement of the present invention comprises:

- a. a handle that preferably comprises at one end a pivotably attached support head; and
- b. a removable cleaning pad having an average absorbency rate of deionized water of not more than about 0.5 g/sec, when measured from $t=0$ to $t=1200$ seconds using the Performance Under Pressure method; and a t_{1200} absorbent capacity of at least about 1 g deionized water per g of the cleaning pad, when measured using the Performance Under Pressure method.

As indicated above, Applicants' discovery is based on the finding that a controlled rate of fluid uptake by the absorbent pad improves overall cleaning performance. In particular, the cleaning pads have an average absorbency rate of not more than about 0.5 g/sec, this average rate being calculated based on the rates measured during the first 1200 seconds (hereafter "average absorbency rate"). Average absorbency rate is determined using the Performance Under Pressure (hereafter referred to as "PUP") method, which is described in detail in the Test Method section below. (Briefly, the PUP method measures a cleaning pad's absorbency at different times under an initial confining pressure of 0.09 psi (which reflects typical in-use pressures during the cleaning operation).) Preferably, the average absorbency rate will be not more than about 0.3 g/sec, more preferably not more than about 0.2 g/sec, still more preferably not more than about 0.1 g/sec.

While avoiding rapid fluid uptake by the pad is required by the cleaning pad to achieve desired cleaning results, it is also necessary for the cleaning pad to absorb a majority of the fluid used during the cleaning process. As such, the cleaning pads will have an absorbent capacity at 1200 seconds (referred to herein as the " t_{1200} absorbent

capacity"), when measured using the PUP method, of at least about 1 g deionized water per g of the cleaning pad. Preferably the cleaning pad will have a t₁₂₀₀ absorbent capacity of at least about 5 g/g, more preferably at least about 10 g/g, still more preferably at least about 20 g/g, and still more preferably at least about 30 g/g.

The cleaning pads will preferably, but not necessarily, have a total fluid capacity (of deionized water) of at least about 100 g, more preferably at least about 200 g, still more preferably at least about 300 g and most preferably at least about 400 g. While pads having a total fluid capacity less than 100 g are within the scope of the invention, they are not as well suited for cleaning large areas, such as seen in a typical household, as are higher capacity pads.

The skilled artisan will recognize that various materials may be utilized to carry out the claimed invention. Thus, while preferred materials are described below for the various implement and cleaning pad components, it is recognized that the scope of the invention is not limited to such disclosures.

A. Handle

The handle of the cleaning implement will be any material that will facilitate gripping of the cleaning implement. The handle of the cleaning implement will preferably comprise any elongated, durable material that will provide practical cleaning. The length of the handle will be dictated by the end-use of the implement.

The handle will preferably comprise at one end a support head to which the cleaning pad can be releasably attached. To facilitate ease of use, the support head can be pivotably attached to the handle using known joint assemblies. Any suitable means for attaching the cleaning pad to the support head may be utilized, so long as the cleaning pad remains affixed during the cleaning process. Examples of suitable fastening means include clamps, hooks & loops (e.g., Velcro®), and the like. In a preferred embodiment, the support head will comprise hooks on its lower surface that will mechanically attach to the upper layer (preferably a distinct attachment layer) of the absorbent cleaning pad.

A preferred handle, comprising a fluid dispensing means, is depicted in Figure 1 and is fully described in co-pending U.S. Patent Application Serial No. _____, filed November 26, 1996 by V. S. Ping et al. (Case 6383), which is incorporated by reference herein. Another preferred handle, which does not contain a fluid dispensing means, is depicted in Figures 1a and 1b and is fully described in co-pending U.S. Patent Application Serial No. _____, filed September 23, 1996 by A. J. Irwin (Case 6262), which is incorporated by reference herein.

B. Removable Cleaning Pad

In light of Applicants' discovery that controlled absorbency rates play an important role in the cleaning performance of the implements of the present invention, the skilled artisan will recognize that the rate of fluid absorption of the cleaning solution by the cleaning pad is dictated by the solution and the materials that make up the pad. In this regard, volume flux (i.e., rate of fluid uptake) may be calculated using the Hagen-Poiseuille law for laminar flow. The Hagen-Poiseuille law provides that volume flux, q , is calculated according to the following formula:

$$q = R^2[(2\gamma\cos\theta/R) - \rho gL]/8L\mu$$

where R is the tube radius, γ is the surface tension of the fluid being absorbed, θ is the contact angle at the fluid-solid interface, ρ is the density of the fluid, g is the gravitational constant, L is the wetted length of the tube, and μ is the viscosity of the fluid. From this equation, it is evident that the rate of absorbency by the cleaning pad is controllable by, for example, adjusting the pore size of the material constituting the cleaning pad, adjusting the surface wettability ($\cos\theta$) of the material for the absorbed fluid, etc. Together with the teachings of the present disclosure, any of the well known absorbent materials may be utilized and combined to achieve the desired initial delay in absorbency, but overall absorbent capacity. Accordingly, while representative materials and embodiments useful as the cleaning pad are described below, the invention is not limited to such materials and embodiments.

i. Scrubbing Layer

The cleaning pad of the present invention will preferably comprise a scrubbing layer and an absorbent layer. The scrubbing layer is the portion of the cleaning pad that contacts the soiled surface during cleaning. As such, materials useful as the scrubbing layer must be sufficiently durable that the layer will retain its integrity during the cleaning process without damaging the surface being cleaned. In addition, when the cleaning pad is used in combination with a solution, the scrubbing layer must be capable of absorbing liquids and soils, and relinquishing those liquids and soils to the absorbent layer. This will ensure that the scrubbing layer will continually be able to remove additional material from the surface being cleaned. Whether the implement is used with a cleaning solution (i.e., in the wet state) or without cleaning solution (i.e., in the dry state), the scrubbing layer will, in addition to removing particulate matter, facilitate other functions, such as polishing, dusting, and buffing the surface being cleaned.

The scrubbing layer can be a monolayer, or a multi-layer structure one or more of whose layers may be slitted to facilitate the scrubbing of the soiled surface and the uptake of particulate matter. This scrubbing layer, as it passes over the soiled surface, interacts with the soil (and cleaning solution when used), loosening and emulsifying tough soils and

permitting them to pass freely into the absorbent layer of the pad. The scrubbing layer preferably contains slits that provide an easy avenue for larger particulate soil to move freely in and become entrapped within the absorbent layer of the pad. Low density structures are preferred for use as the scrubbing layer, to facilitate transport of particulate matter to the pad's absorbent layer.

In order to provide desired integrity, materials particularly suitable for the scrubbing layer include synthetics such as polyolefins (e.g., polyethylene and polypropylene), polyesters, polyamides, synthetic cellulosics (e.g., Rayon®), and blends thereof. Such synthetic materials may be manufactured using known process such as carding, spunbonding, meltblowing, airlaying, needlepunching and the like.

ii. Absorbent Layer

The absorbent layer serves to retain any fluid and soil absorbed by the cleaning pad during use. While the scrubbing layer has some effect on the pad's ability to provide the requisite fluid absorption rates, the absorbent layer plays the major role in achieving the absorption rates and overall absorbency of the present invention.

The absorbent layer will be capable of removing fluid and soil from the scrubbing layer so that the scrubbing layer will have capacity to continually remove soil from the surface. The absorbent layer also should be capable of retaining absorbed material under typical in-use pressures to avoid "squeeze-out" of absorbed soil, cleaning solution, etc.

The absorbent layer will comprise any material that is capable of absorbing fluids at the requisite rates, and retaining such fluids during use. To achieve desired total fluid capacities, it will be preferred to include in the absorbent layer a material having a relatively high capacity (in terms of grams of fluid per gram of absorbent material). As used herein, the term "superabsorbent material" means any absorbent material having a g/g capacity for water of at least about 15 g/g, when measured under a confining pressure of 0.3 psi. Because a majority of the cleaning fluids useful with the present invention are aqueous based, it is preferred that the superabsorbent materials have a relatively high g/g capacity for water and water-based fluids.

Representative superabsorbent materials include water insoluble, water-swellaable superabsorbent gelling polymers (referred to herein as "superabsorbent gelling polymers") which are well known in the literature. These materials demonstrate very high absorbent capacities for water. The superabsorbent gelling polymers useful in the present invention can have a size, shape and/or morphology varying over a wide range. These polymers can be in the form of particles that do not have a large ratio of greatest dimension to smallest dimension (e.g., granules, flakes, pulverulents, interparticle aggregates, interparticle crosslinked aggregates, and the like) or they can be in the form of fibers, sheets, films, foams, laminates, and the like. The use of superabsorbent gelling polymers in fibrous form

provides the benefit of providing enhanced retention of the superabsorbent material, relative to particles, during the cleaning process. While their capacity is generally lower for aqueous-based mixtures, these materials still demonstrate significant absorbent capacity for such mixtures. The patent literature is replete with disclosures of water-swellaable materials. See, for example, U.S. Patent 3,699,103 (Harper et al.), issued June 13, 1972; U.S. Patent 3,770,731 (Harmon), issued June 20, 1972; U.S. Reissue Patent 32,649 (Brandt et al.), reissued April 19, 1989; U.S. Patent 4,834,735 (Alemany et al.), issued May 30, 1989.

Superabsorbent gelling polymers useful in the present invention include a variety of water-insoluble, but water-swellaable polymers capable of absorbing large quantities of fluids. Such polymeric materials are also commonly referred to as "hydrocolloids", and can include polysaccharides such as carboxymethyl starch, carboxymethyl cellulose, and hydroxypropyl cellulose; nonionic types such as polyvinyl alcohol, and polyvinyl ethers; cationic types such as polyvinyl pyridine, polyvinyl morpholinone, and N,N-dimethylaminoethyl or N,N-diethylaminopropyl acrylates and methacrylates, and the respective quaternary salts thereof. Typically, superabsorbent gelling polymers useful in the present invention have a multiplicity of anionic functional groups, such as sulfonic acid, and more typically carboxy, groups. Examples of polymers suitable for use herein include those which are prepared from polymerizable, unsaturated, acid-containing monomers. Thus, such monomers include the olefinically unsaturated acids and anhydrides that contain at least one carbon to carbon olefinic double bond. More specifically, these monomers can be selected from olefinically unsaturated carboxylic acids and acid anhydrides, olefinically unsaturated sulfonic acids, and mixtures thereof.

Some non-acid monomers can also be included, usually in minor amounts, in preparing the superabsorbent gelling polymers useful herein. Such non-acid monomers can include, for example, the water-soluble or water-dispersible esters of the acid-containing monomers, as well as monomers that contain no carboxylic or sulfonic acid groups at all. Optional non-acid monomers can thus include monomers containing the following types of functional groups: carboxylic acid or sulfonic acid esters, hydroxyl groups, amide-groups, amino groups, nitrile groups, quaternary ammonium salt groups, aryl groups (e.g., phenyl groups, such as those derived from styrene monomer). These non-acid monomers are well-known materials and are described in greater detail, for example, in U.S. Patent 4,076,663 (Masuda et al), issued February 28, 1978, and in U.S. Patent 4,062,817 (Westerman), issued December 13, 1977, both of which are incorporated by reference.

Olefinically unsaturated carboxylic acid and carboxylic acid anhydride monomers include the acrylic acids typified by acrylic acid itself, methacrylic acid, ethacrylic acid, α -chloroacrylic acid, α -cyanoacrylic acid, β -methylacrylic acid (crotonic acid), α -

phenylacrylic acid, β -acryloxypropionic acid, sorbic acid, α -chlorosorbic acid, angelic acid, cinnamic acid, p-chlorocinnamic acid, β -sterylacrylic acid, itaconic acid, citraconic acid, mesaconic acid, glutaconic acid, aconitic acid, maleic acid, fumaric acid, tricarboxyethylene and maleic acid anhydride.

Olefinically unsaturated sulfonic acid monomers include aliphatic or aromatic vinyl sulfonic acids such as vinylsulfonic acid, allyl sulfonic acid, vinyl toluene sulfonic acid and styrene sulfonic acid; acrylic and methacrylic sulfonic acid such as sulfoethyl acrylate, sulfoethyl methacrylate, sulfopropyl acrylate, sulfopropyl methacrylate, 2-hydroxy-3-methacryloxypropyl sulfonic acid and 2-acrylamide-2-methylpropane sulfonic acid.

Preferred superabsorbent gelling polymers for use in the present invention contain carboxy groups. These polymers include hydrolyzed starch-acrylonitrile graft copolymers, partially neutralized hydrolyzed starch-acrylonitrile graft copolymers, starch-acrylic acid graft copolymers, partially neutralized starch-acrylic acid graft copolymers, saponified vinyl acetate-acrylic ester copolymers, hydrolyzed acrylonitrile or acrylamide copolymers, slightly network crosslinked polymers of any of the foregoing copolymers, partially neutralized polyacrylic acid, and slightly network crosslinked polymers of partially neutralized polyacrylic acid. These polymers can be used either solely or in the form of a mixture of two or more different polymers. Examples of these polymer materials are disclosed in U.S. Patent 3,661,875, U.S. Patent 4,076,663, U.S. Patent 4,093,776, U.S. Patent 4,666,983, and U.S. Patent 4,734,478.

Most preferred polymer materials for use in making the superabsorbent gelling polymers are slightly network crosslinked polymers of partially neutralized polyacrylic acids and starch derivatives thereof. Most preferably, the hydrogel-forming absorbent polymers comprise from about 50 to about 95%, preferably about 75%, neutralized, slightly network crosslinked, polyacrylic acid (i.e. poly (sodium acrylate/acrylic acid)). Network crosslinking renders the polymer substantially water-insoluble and, in part, determines the absorptive capacity and extractable polymer content characteristics of the superabsorbent gelling polymers. Processes for network crosslinking these polymers and typical network crosslinking agents are described in greater detail in U.S. Patent 4,076,663.

While the superabsorbent gelling polymers is preferably of one type (i.e., homogeneous), mixtures of polymers can also be used in the implements of the present invention. For example, mixtures of starch-acrylic acid graft copolymers and slightly network crosslinked polymers of partially neutralized polyacrylic acid can be used in the present invention.

While any of the superabsorbent gelling polymers described in the prior art may be useful in the present invention, it has recently been recognized that where significant levels (e.g., more than about 50% by weight of the absorbent structure) of superabsorbent gelling

polymers are to be included in an absorbent structure, and in particular where one or more regions of the absorbent layer will comprise more than about 50%, by weight of the region, the problem of gel blocking by the swollen particles may impede fluid flow and thereby adversely affect the ability of the gelling polymers to absorb to their full capacity in the desired period of time. U.S. Patent 5,147,343 (Kellenberger et al.), issued September 15, 1992 and U.S. Patent 5,149,335 (Kellenberger et al.), issued September 22, 1992, describe superabsorbent gelling polymers in terms of their Absorbency Under Load (AUL), where gelling polymers absorb fluid (0.9% saline) under a confining pressure of 0.3 psi. (The disclosure of each of these patents is incorporated herein.) The methods for determining AUL are described in these patents. Polymers described therein may be particularly useful in embodiments of the present invention that contain regions of relatively high levels of superabsorbent gelling polymers. In particular, where high concentrations of superabsorbent gelling polymer are incorporated in the cleaning pad, those polymers will preferably have an AUL, measured according to the methods described in U.S. Patent 5,147,343, of at least about 24 ml/g, more preferably at least about 27 ml/g after 1 hour; or an AUL, measured according to the methods described in U.S. Patent 5,149,335, of at least about 15 ml/g, more preferably at least about 18 ml/g after 15 minutes. Commonly assigned copending U.S. application Serial Numbers 08/219,547 (Goldman et al.), filed March 29, 1994 and 08/416,396 (Goldman et al.), filed April 6, 1995 (both of which are incorporated by reference herein), also address the problem of gel blocking and describe superabsorbent gelling polymers useful in overcoming this phenomena. These applications specifically describe superabsorbent gelling polymers which avoid gel blocking at even higher confining pressures, specifically 0.7 psi. In the embodiments of the present invention where the absorbent layer will contain regions comprising high levels (e.g., more than about 50% by weight of the region) of superabsorbent gelling polymer, it may be preferred that the superabsorbent gelling polymer be as described in the aforementioned applications by Goldman et al.

In addition to the contribution to overall fluid absorbency, the superabsorbent material also directly effects the rate of absorbency by the pad. As such, where superabsorbent gelling polymers in particulate form are employed, the skilled artisan will recognize that the rate of fluid absorbency by the cleaning pad can be controlled by adjusting, for example, the average particle size and/or the particle size distribution of the material.

Other useful superabsorbent materials include hydrophilic polymeric foams, such as those described in commonly assigned copending U.S. patent application Serial No. 08/563,866 (DesMarais et al.), filed November 29, 1995 and U.S. Patent No. 5,387,207 (Dyer et al.), issued February 7, 1995. These references describe polymeric, hydrophilic

absorbent foams that are obtained by polymerizing a high internal phase water-in-oil emulsion (commonly referred to as HIPEs). These foams are readily tailored to provide varying physical properties (pore size, capillary suction, density, etc.) that affect fluid handling ability. As such, these materials are particularly useful, either alone or in combination with other such foams or with fibrous structures, in providing the overall capacity required by the present invention.

Where superabsorbent material is included in the absorbent layer, the absorbent layer will preferably comprise at least about 15%, by weight of the absorbent layer, more preferably at least about 20%, still more preferably at least about 25%, of the superabsorbent material.

The absorbent layer may also consist of or comprise fibrous material. Fibers useful in the present invention include those that are naturally occurring (modified or unmodified), as well as synthetically made fibers. Examples of suitable unmodified/modified naturally occurring fibers include cotton, Esparto grass, bagasse, kemp, flax, silk, wool, wood pulp, chemically modified wood pulp, jute, ethyl cellulose, and cellulose acetate. Suitable synthetic fibers can be made from polyvinyl chloride, polyvinyl fluoride, polytetrafluoroethylene, polyvinylidene chloride, polyacrylics such as ORLON®, polyvinyl acetate, RAYON®, polyethylvinyl acetate, non-soluble or soluble polyvinyl alcohol, polyolefins such as polyethylene (e.g., PULPEX®) and polypropylene, polyamides such as nylon, polyesters such as DACRON® or KODEL®, polyurethanes, polystyrenes, and the like. The absorbent layer can comprise solely naturally occurring fibers, solely synthetic fibers, or any compatible combination of naturally occurring and synthetic fibers.

The fibers useful herein can be hydrophilic, hydrophobic or can be a combination of both hydrophilic and hydrophobic fibers. As indicated above, the particular selection of hydrophilic or hydrophobic fibers will depend upon the other materials included in the absorbent (and to some degree the scrubbing) layer. That is, the nature of the fibers will be such that the cleaning pad exhibits the necessary fluid delay and overall fluid absorbency. Suitable hydrophilic fibers for use in the present invention include cellulosic fibers, modified cellulosic fibers, rayon, polyester fibers such as hydrophilic nylon (HYDROFIL®). Suitable hydrophilic fibers can also be obtained by hydrophilizing hydrophobic fibers, such as surfactant-treated or silica-treated thermoplastic fibers derived from, for example, polyolefins such as polyethylene or polypropylene, polyacrylics, polyamides, polystyrenes, polyurethanes and the like.

Suitable wood pulp fibers can be obtained from well-known chemical processes such as the Kraft and sulfite processes. It is especially preferred to derive these wood pulp fibers from southern soft woods due to their premium absorbency characteristics. These wood pulp fibers can also be obtained from mechanical processes, such as ground wood, refiner

mechanical, thermomechanical, chemimechanical, and chemi-thermomechanical pulp processes. Recycled or secondary wood pulp fibers, as well as bleached and unbleached wood pulp fibers, can be used.

Another type of hydrophilic fiber for use in the present invention is chemically stiffened cellulosic fibers. As used herein, the term "chemically stiffened cellulosic fibers" means cellulosic fibers that have been stiffened by chemical means to increase the stiffness of the fibers under both dry and aqueous conditions. Such means can include the addition of a chemical stiffening agent that, for example, coats and/or impregnates the fibers. Such means can also include the stiffening of the fibers by altering the chemical structure, e.g., by crosslinking polymer chains.

Where fibers are used as the absorbent layer (or a constituent component thereof), the fibers may optionally be combined with a thermoplastic material. Upon melting, at least a portion of this thermoplastic material migrates to the intersections of the fibers, typically due to interfiber capillary gradients. These intersections become bond sites for the thermoplastic material. When cooled, the thermoplastic materials at these intersections solidify to form the bond sites that hold the matrix or web of fibers together in each of the respective layers. This may be beneficial in providing additional overall integrity to the cleaning pad.

Amongst its various effects, bonding at the fiber intersections increases the overall compressive modulus and strength of the resulting thermally bonded member. In the case of the chemically stiffened cellulosic fibers, the melting and migration of the thermoplastic material also has the effect of increasing the average pore size of the resultant web, while maintaining the density and basis weight of the web as originally formed. This can improve the fluid acquisition properties of the thermally bonded web upon initial exposure to fluid, due to improved fluid permeability, and upon subsequent exposure, due to the combined ability of the stiffened fibers to retain their stiffness upon wetting and the ability of the thermoplastic material to remain bonded at the fiber intersections upon wetting and upon wet compression. In net, thermally bonded webs of stiffened fibers retain their original overall volume, but with the volumetric regions previously occupied by the thermoplastic material becoming open to thus increase the average interfiber capillary pore size.

Thermoplastic materials useful in the present invention can be in any of a variety of forms including particulates, fibers, or combinations of particulates and fibers. Thermoplastic fibers are a particularly preferred form because of their ability to form numerous interfiber bond sites. Suitable thermoplastic materials can be made from any thermoplastic polymer that can be melted at temperatures that will not extensively damage the fibers that comprise the primary web or matrix of each layer. Preferably, the melting point of this thermoplastic material will be less than about 190°C, and preferably between

about 75°C and about 175°C. In any event, the melting point of this thermoplastic material should be no lower than the temperature at which the thermally bonded absorbent structures, when used in the cleaning pads, are likely to be stored. The melting point of the thermoplastic material is typically no lower than about 50°C.

The thermoplastic materials, and in particular the thermoplastic fibers, can be made from a variety of thermoplastic polymers, including polyolefins such as polyethylene (e.g., PULPEX®) and polypropylene, polyesters, copolyesters, polyvinyl acetate, polyethylvinyl acetate, polyvinyl chloride, polyvinylidene chloride, polyacrylics, polyamides, copolyamides, polystyrenes, polyurethanes and copolymers of any of the foregoing such as vinyl chloride/vinyl acetate, and the like. Depending upon the desired characteristics for the resulting thermally bonded absorbent member, suitable thermoplastic materials include hydrophobic fibers that have been made hydrophilic, such as surfactant-treated or silica-treated thermoplastic fibers derived from, for example, polyolefins such as polyethylene or polypropylene, polyacrylics, polyamides, polystyrenes, polyurethanes and the like. The surface of the hydrophobic thermoplastic fiber can be rendered hydrophilic by treatment with a surfactant, such as a nonionic or anionic surfactant, e.g., by spraying the fiber with a surfactant, by dipping the fiber into a surfactant or by including the surfactant as part of the polymer melt in producing the thermoplastic fiber. Upon melting and resolidification, the surfactant will tend to remain at the surfaces of the thermoplastic fiber. Suitable surfactants include nonionic surfactants such as Brij® 76 manufactured by ICI Americas, Inc. of Wilmington, Delaware, and various surfactants sold under the Pegosperse® trademark by Glyco Chemical, Inc. of Greenwich, Connecticut. Besides nonionic surfactants, anionic surfactants can also be used. These surfactants can be applied to the thermoplastic fibers at levels of, for example, from about 0.2 to about 1 g. per sq. of centimeter of thermoplastic fiber.

Suitable thermoplastic fibers can be made from a single polymer (monocomponent fibers), or can be made from more than one polymer (e.g., bicomponent fibers). As used herein, "bicomponent fibers" refers to thermoplastic fibers that comprise a core fiber made from one polymer that is encased within a thermoplastic sheath made from a different polymer. The polymer comprising the sheath often melts at a different, typically lower, temperature than the polymer comprising the core. As a result, these bicomponent fibers provide thermal bonding due to melting of the sheath polymer, while retaining the desirable strength characteristics of the core polymer.

Suitable bicomponent fibers for use in the present invention can include sheath/core fibers having the following polymer combinations: polyethylene/ polypropylene, polyethylvinyl acetate/polypropylene, polyethylene/polyester, polypropylene/polyester, copolyester/polyester, and the like. Particularly suitable bicomponent thermoplastic fibers

for use herein are those having a polypropylene or polyester core, and a lower melting copolyester, polyethylvinyl acetate or polyethylene sheath (e.g., those available from Danaklon a/s, Chisso Corp., and CELBOND®, available from Hercules). These bicomponent fibers can be concentric or eccentric. As used herein, the terms "concentric" and "eccentric" refer to whether the sheath has a thickness that is even, or uneven, through the cross-sectional area of the bicomponent fiber. Eccentric bicomponent fibers can be desirable in providing more compressive strength at lower fiber thicknesses.

Methods for preparing thermally bonded fibrous materials are described in copending U.S. application Serial No. 08/479,096 (Richards et al.), filed July 3, 1995 (see especially pages 16-20) and U.S. Patent 5,549,589 (Horney et al.), issued August 27, 1996 (see especially Columns 9 to 10). The disclosure of both of these references are incorporated by reference herein.

The absorbent layer may also comprise a HIPE-derived hydrophilic, polymeric foam that does not have the high absorbency of those described above as "superabsorbent materials". Such foams and methods for their preparation are described in U.S. Patent 5,550,167 (DesMarais), issued August 27, 1996; and commonly assigned copending U.S. patent application Serial No. 08/370,695 (Stone et al.), filed January 10, 1995 (both of which are incorporated by reference herein).

The absorbent layer of the cleaning pad may be comprised of a homogeneous material, such as a blend of cellulosic fibers (optionally thermally bonded) and particulate swellable superabsorbent gelling polymer. Alternatively, the absorbent layer may be comprised of discrete layers of material, such as a layer of thermally bonded airlaid material and a discrete layer of a superabsorbent material. For example, a thermally bonded layer of cellulosic fibers can be located lower than (i.e., beneath) the superabsorbent material (i.e., between the superabsorbent material and the scrubbing layer). In order to achieve high absorptive capacity and retention of fluids under pressure, while at the same time providing initial delay in fluid uptake, it may be preferable to utilize such discrete layers when forming the absorbent layer. In this regard, the superabsorbent material can be located remote from the scrubbing layer by including a less absorbent layer as the lower-most aspect of the absorbent layer. For example, a layer of cellulosic fibers can be located lower (i.e., beneath) than the superabsorbent material (i.e., between the superabsorbent material and the scrubbing layer).

In a preferred embodiment, the absorbent layer will comprise a thermally bonded airlaid web of cellulose fibers (Flint River, available from Weyerhaeuser, Wa) and AL Thermal C (thermoplastic available from Danaklon a/s, Varde, Denmark), and a swellable hydrogel-forming superabsorbent polymer. The superabsorbent polymer is preferably incorporated such that a discrete layer is located near the surface of the absorbent layer

which is remote from the scrubbing layer. Preferably, a thin layer of, e.g., cellulose fibers (optionally thermally bonded), are positioned above the superabsorbent gelling polymer to enhance containment.

iii. Optional Attachment Layer

The cleaning pads of the present invention will also optionally have an attachment layer that allows the pad to be connected to the implement's handle or the support head in preferred implements. The attachment layer will be necessary in those embodiments where an absorbent layer is utilized, but is not suitable for attaching the pad to the support head of the handle. The attachment layer may also function as a means to prevent fluid flow through the top surface (i.e., the handle-contacting surface) of the cleaning pad, and may further provide enhanced integrity of the pad. As with the scrubbing and absorbent layers, the attachment layer may consist of a mono-layer or a multi-layer structure, so long as it meets the above requirements.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the attachment layer will comprise a surface which is capable of being mechanically attached to the handle's support head by use of known hook and loop technology. In such an embodiment, the attachment layer will comprise at least one surface which is mechanically attachable to hooks that are permanently affixed to the bottom surface of the handle's support head.

To achieve the desired fluid imperviousness and attachability, it is preferred that a laminated structure comprising, e.g., a meltblown film and fibrous, nonwoven structure be utilized. In a preferred embodiment, the attachment layer is a tri-layered material having a layer of meltblown polypropylene film located between two layers of spun-bonded polypropylene.

III. Cleaning Pad

While the cleaning pads of the present development are particularly suitable for use in the above-described cleaning implements, the ability to control fluid absorption, followed by subsequent uptake and retention of significant amounts of fluid gives the cleaning pads a utility separate from their combination with a handle to form an implement such as a mop. As such, the cleaning pads themselves can be used without attachment to a handle. They may therefore be constructed without the need to be attachable to a handle. However, it may be convenient to construct the cleaning pads such that they may be used either in combination with the handle or as a stand-alone product. As such, it may be preferred to prepare the pads with an optional attachment layer. In all other respects, the stand-alone cleaning pad is essentially as described hereinbefore. Of course, where the cleaning pad is designed for cleaning hard surfaces of smaller dimensions than household floors (e.g.,

countertops, sinks, cooking surfaces, tubs, etc.), such pads may be made with relatively lower overall capacities.

IV. Other Aspects and Specific Embodiments of the Invention

When the cleaning pad is comprised of discrete layers, the various layers may be bonded together utilizing any means that provides the pad with sufficient integrity during the cleaning process. The scrubbing and attachment layers, when present, may be bonded to the absorbent layer or to each other by any of a variety of bonding means, including the use of a uniform continuous layer of adhesive, a patterned layer of adhesive or any array of separate lines, spirals or spots of adhesive. Alternatively, the bonding means may comprise heat bonds, pressure bonds, ultrasonic bonds, dynamic mechanical bonds or any other suitable bonding means or combinations of these bonding means as are known in the art. Bonding may be around the perimeter of the cleaning pad (e.g., heat sealing the scrubbing layer and optional attachment layer), and/or across the area (i.e., the X-Y plane) of the cleaning pad so as to form a pattern on the surface of the cleaning pad. Bonding the layers of the cleaning pad with ultrasonic bonds across the area of the pad will provide integrity to avoid shearing of the discrete pad layers during use.

The cleaning pad of the present invention will be capable of retaining absorbed fluid, even during the pressures exerted during the cleaning process. This is referred to herein as the cleaning pad's ability to avoid "squeeze-out" of absorbed fluid, or conversely its ability to retain absorbed fluid under pressure. The method for measuring squeeze-out is described in the Test Methods section. Briefly, the test measures the ability of a saturated cleaning pad to retain fluid when subjected to a pressure of 0.25 psi. Preferably, the cleaning pads of the present invention will have a squeeze-out value of not more than about 40%, more preferably not more than about 25%, still more preferably not more than about 15%, and most preferably not more than about 10%.

The cleaning implement of the present invention is preferably used in combination with a cleaning solution. The cleaning solution may consist of any known hard surface cleaning composition. Hard surface cleaning compositions are typically aqueous-based solutions comprising one or more of surfactants, solvents, builders, chelants, polymers, suds suppressors, enzymes, etc. Suitable surfactants include anionic, nonionic, zwitterionic, amphoteric and cationic surfactants. Examples of anionic surfactants include, but are not limited to, linear alkyl benzene sulfonates, alkyl sulfates, alkyl sulfonates, and the like. Examples of nonionic surfactants include alkylethoxylates, alkylphenoethoxylates, alkylpolyglucosides, alkylglucamines, sorbitan esters, and the like. Examples of zwitterionic surfactants include betaines and sulfobetaines. Examples of amphoteric surfactants include materials derived using imidazole chemistry, such as alkylampho

glycinates, and alkyl imino propionate. Examples of cationic surfactants include alkyl mono-, di-, and tri-ammonium surfactants. All of the above materials are available commercially, and are described in McCutcheon's Vol. 1: Emulsifiers and Detergents, North American Ed., McCutcheon Division, MC Publishing Co., 1995.

Suitable solvents include short chain (e.g., C₁-C₆) derivatives of oxyethylene glycol and oxypropylene glycol, such as mono- and di-ethylene glycol n-hexyl ether, mono-, di- and tri-propylene glycol n-butyl ether, and the like. Suitable builders include those derived from phosphorous sources, such orthophosphate and pyrophosphate, and non-phosphorous sources, such as nitrilotriacetic acid, S,S-ethylene diamine disuccinic acid, and the like. Suitable chelants include ethylene diamine tetra acetic acid and citric acid, and the like. Suitable polymers include those that are anionic, cationic, zwitterionic, and nonionic. Suitable suds suppressors include silicone polymers and linear or branched C₁₀-C₁₈ fatty acids or alcohols. Suitable enzymes include lipases, proteases, amylases and other enzymes known to be useful for catalysis of soil degradation.

A suitable cleaning solution for use with the present implement comprises from about 0.1% to about 2.0% of a linear alcohol ethoxylate surfactant (e.g., Neodol 91-5®, available from Shell Chemical Co.); from about 0 to about 2.0% of an alkylsulfonate (e.g., Bioterge PAS-8s, a linear C₈ sulfonate available from Stepan Co.); from about 0 to about 0.1% potassium hydroxide; from about 0 to about 0.1% potassium carbonate or bicarbonate; from about 0 to about 10% organic acids, optional adjuvants such dyes and/or perfumes; and from about 99.9% to about 90% deionized or softened water.

Where superabsorbent polymeric material is used in the cleaning pad, it is possible to control the rate of fluid uptake by controlling the pH of the cleaning solution. In particular, where such polymers are present, the cleaning solution will preferably have a pH of not more than about 9, preferably a pH of not more than about 7, still more preferably a pH of not more than about 5, and most preferably a pH of from about 2 to about 5.

Referring to the figures which depict representative cleaning pads of the present invention, Figure 2 is a perspective view of a removable cleaning pad 200 comprising a scrubbing layer 201, an attachment layer 203 and an absorbent layer 205 positioned between the scrubbing layer and the attachment layer. As indicated above, while Figure 2 depicts each of layers 201, 203 and 205 as a single layer of material, one or more of these layers may consist of a laminate of two or more plies. For example, in a preferred embodiment, scrubbing layer 201 is a two-ply laminate of carded polypropylene, where the lower layer is slitted. Also, though not depicted in Figure 2, materials that do not inhibit fluid flow may be positioned between scrubbing layer 201 and absorbent layer 203 and/or between absorbent layer 203 and attachment layer 205. However, it is important that the scrubbing and absorbent layers be in substantial fluid communication, to provide the

requisite absorbency of the cleaning pad. While Figure 2 depicts pad 200 as having all of the pad's layers of equal size in the X and Y dimensions, it is preferred that the scrubbing layer 201 and attachment layer 205 be larger than the absorbent layer, such that layers 201 and 205 can be bonded together around the periphery of the pad to provide integrity. The scrubbing and attachment layers may be bonded to the absorbent layer or to each other by any of a variety of bonding means, including the use of a uniform continuous layer of adhesive, a patterned layer of adhesive or any array of separate lines, spirals or spots of adhesive. Alternatively, the bonding means may comprise heat bonds, pressure bonds, ultrasonic bonds, dynamic mechanical bonds or any other suitable bonding means or combinations of these bonding means as are known in the art. Bonding may be around the perimeter of the cleaning pad, and/or across the surface of the cleaning pad so as to form a pattern on the surface of the scrubbing layer 201.

Figure 3 is a blown perspective view of the absorbent layer 305 of an embodiment of a cleaning pad of the present invention. Absorbent layer 305 is depicted in this embodiment as consisting of a tri-laminate structure. Specifically absorbent layer 305 is shown to consist of a discrete layer of particulate superabsorbent gelling material, shown as 307, positioned between two discrete layers 306 and 308 of fibrous material. In this embodiment, because of the region 307 of high concentration of superabsorbent gelling material, it is preferred that the superabsorbent material not exhibit gel blocking discussed above. In a particularly preferred embodiment, fibrous layers 306 and 308 will each be a thermally bonded fibrous substrate of cellulosic fibers, and lower fibrous layer 308 will be in direct fluid communication with the scrubbing layer (not shown).

Figure 4 is a cross-sectional view of cleaning pad 400 having a scrubbing layer 401, an attachment layer 403, and an absorbent layer 405 positioned between the scrubbing and attachment layers. Cleaning pad 400 is shown here to have absorbent layer 405 smaller, in the X and Y dimensions, than scrubbing layer 401 and attachment layer 403. Layers 401 and 403 are therefore depicted as being bonded to one another along the periphery of the cleaning pad. Also, in this embodiment, absorbent layer 405 is depicted as having two discrete layers 405a and 405b. In a preferred embodiment, upper layer 405a is a hydrophilic polymeric foam material such as that described in commonly assigned copending U.S. patent application Serial No. 08/563,866 (DesMarais et al.), filed November 29, 1995; and lower layer 405b is a polymeric foam material such as that described in U.S. Patent 5,550,167 (DesMarais), issued August 27, 1996 or commonly assigned copending U.S. patent application Serial No. 08/370,695 (Stone et al.), filed January 10, 1995. As discussed above, each of layers 405a and 405b may be formed using two or more individual layers of the respective material.

Figure 7 is a blown perspective view of a cleaning pad 600 having an optional scrim material 602. This scrim material 602 is depicted as a distinct material positioned between scrubbing layer 601 and absorbent layer 605. In another embodiment, scrim 602 may be in the form of a printed resin or other synthetic material on the scrubbing layer 601 (preferably the upper surface) or the absorbent layer 605 (preferably the lower surface). Figure 7 also depicts an optional attachment layer 603 that is positioned above absorbent layer 605. As discussed above, the scrim may provide improved cleaning of soils that are not readily solubilized by the cleaning solution utilized, if any. The relatively open structure of the scrim 602 provides the necessary fluid communication between the scrubbing layer 601 and absorbent layer 605, to provide the requisite absorbency rates and capacity. Again, while Figure 7 depicts each of layers 601, 603 and 605 as a single layer of material, one or more of these layers may consist of two or more plies.

While Figure 7 depicts pad 600 as having all of the pad's layers of equal size in the X and Y dimensions, it is preferred that the scrubbing layer 601 and attachment layer 603 be larger than the absorbent layer, such that layers 601 and 603 can be bonded together around the periphery of pad 600 to provide integrity. It may also be preferred that the scrim material 602 be equal size in at least one of the X or Y dimensions, to facilitate bonding at the periphery of the pad with the scrubbing layer 601 and the attachment layer 603. This is particularly preferred when the scrim material is a distinct layer (i.e., is not printed on a substrate). In those embodiments where the scrim is created by printing, e.g., a resin on a substrate, it may not be important that the scrim be located such that it is part of the peripheral bond. The scrubbing layer 601, scrim 602 and attachment layer 603 may be bonded to the absorbent layer or to each other by any of a variety of bonding means, including the use of a uniform continuous layer of adhesive, a patterned layer of adhesive or any array of separate lines, spirals or spots of adhesive. Alternatively, the bonding means may comprise heat bonds, pressure bonds, ultrasonic bonds, dynamic mechanical bonds or any other suitable bonding means or combinations of these bonding means as are known in the art. Bonding may be around the perimeter of the cleaning pad, and/or across the surface of the cleaning pad so as to form a pattern on the surface of the scrubbing layer 601.

Figure 8 is a perspective view of a preferred embodiment of a pad 700 comprising a scrim 702. Figure 8 shows an absorbent layer 705, an attachment layer 703 and scrubbing layer 701 that is partially cut away to facilitate illustration of scrim 702. (Scrim 702 may be a distinct layer of material, or may be a component of either the scrubbing layer or absorbent layer.) Pad 700 is depicted as having a lower hard surface-contacting surface 700a and an upper implement-contacting surface 700b. Pad 700 has two opposed side edges 700c, which correspond to the "X" dimension of the pad, and two opposed end edges

700d, which correspond to the "Y" dimension of the pad. (In use, where pad 700 is rectangular in the X-Y dimension, the typical cleaning motion will generally be in the "back and forth direction" indicated by arrow 710.) As is illustrated, in this preferred embodiment, scrim 702 extends to the end edges 700d to allow bonding to the attachment layer 703 and the scrubbing layer 701 (though not depicted as such, absorbent layer 705 will preferably be shorter in the X and Y dimensions, to facilitate bonding of the scrim and the attachment and scrubbing layers). However, scrim 702 does not extend to side edges 700c. Termination of scrim 702 before side edges 700c provides pad 700 with regions 711 of scrubbing layer 701 that do not exhibit the texture of scrim 702 and therefore are relatively smooth. These smooth regions 711 allow for uniform removal of soil/solution during the wiping process.

V. Test Methods

A. Performance Under Pressure

This test determines the gram/gram absorption capacity and the g/sec average absorbency rate of deionized water for a cleaning pad that is laterally confined in a piston/cylinder assembly under an initial confining pressure of 0.09 psi (about 0.6 kPa). (Depending on the composition of the cleaning pad sample, the confining pressure may decrease slightly as the sample absorbs water and swells during the time of the test.) The objective of the test is to assess the average rate that a cleaning pad absorbs fluid, over a practical period of time, when the pad is exposed to usage conditions (horizontal wicking and pressures).

The test fluid for the PUP capacity test is deionized water. This fluid is absorbed by the cleaning pad under demand absorption conditions at near-zero hydrostatic pressure.

A suitable apparatus 510 for this test is shown in Figure 5. At one end of this apparatus is a fluid reservoir 512 (such as a petri dish) having a cover 514. Reservoir 512 rests on an analytical balance indicated generally as 516. The other end of apparatus 510 is a fritted funnel indicated generally as 518, a piston/cylinder assembly indicated generally as 520 that fits inside funnel 518, and cylindrical plastic fritted funnel cover indicated generally as 522 that fits over funnel 518 and is open at the bottom and closed at the top, the top having a pinhole. Apparatus 510 has a system for conveying fluid in either direction that consists of sections of glass capillary tubing indicated as 524 and 531a, flexible plastic tubing (e.g., 1/4 inch i.d. and 3/8 inch o.d. Tygon tubing) indicated as 531b, stopcock assemblies 526 and 538 and Teflon connectors 548, 550 and 552 to connect glass tubing 524 and 531a and stopcock assemblies 526 and 538. Stopcock assembly 526 consists of a 3-way valve 528, glass capillary tubing 530 and 534 in the main fluid system, and a section

of glass capillary tubing 532 for replenishing reservoir 512 and forward flushing the fritted disc in fritted funnel 518. Stopcock assembly 538 similarly consists of a 3-way valve 540, glass capillary tubing 542 and 546 in the main fluid line, and a section of glass capillary tubing 544 that acts as a drain for the system.

Referring to Figure 6, assembly 520 consists of a cylinder 554, a cup-like piston indicated by 556 and a weight 558 that fits inside piston 556. Attached to bottom end of cylinder 554 is a No. 400 mesh stainless steel cloth screen 559 that is biaxially stretched to tautness prior to attachment. The cleaning pad sample indicated generally as 560 rests on screen 559 with the surface-contacting (or scrubbing) layer in contact with screen 559. (If the sample from which the cleaning pad is cut is designed such that both its surfaces are to be in contact with the surface during the cleaning operation, the surface which is directed primarily for the initial scrubbing action should be in contact with screen 559.) The cleaning pad sample is a circular sample having a diameter of 5.4 cm. (While sample 560 is depicted as a single layer, the sample will actually consist of a circular sample having all layers contained by the pad from which the sample is cut.) Cylinder 554 is bored from a transparent LEXAN[®] rod (or equivalent) and has an inner diameter of 6.00 cm (area = 28.25 cm^2), with a wall thickness of approximately 5 mm and a height of approximately 5 cm. The piston 556 is in the form of a Teflon cup and is machined to fit into cylinder 554 within tight tolerances. Cylindrical stainless steel weight 558 is machined to fit snugly within piston 556 and is fitted with a handle on the top (not shown) for ease in removing. The combined weight of piston 556 and weight 558 is 145.3 g, which corresponds to a pressure of 0.09 psi for an area of 22.9 cm^2 .

The components of apparatus 510 are sized such that the flow rate of deionized water therethrough, under a 10 cm hydrostatic head, is at least $0.01 \text{ g/cm}^2/\text{sec}$, where the flow rate is normalized by the area of fritted funnel 518. Factors particularly impactful on flow rate are the permeability of the fritted disc in fritted funnel 518 and the inner diameters of glass tubing 524, 530, 534, 542, 546 and 531a, and stopcock valves 528 and 540.

Reservoir 512 is positioned on an analytical balance 516 that is accurate to at least 0.01g with a drift of less than 0.1g/hr. The balance is preferably interfaced to a computer with software that can (i) monitor balance weight change at pre-set time intervals from the initiation of the PUP test and (ii) be set to auto initiate on a weight change of 0.01-0.05 g, depending on balance sensitivity. Capillary tubing 524 entering the reservoir 512 should not contact either the bottom thereof or cover 514. The volume of fluid (not shown) in reservoir 512 should be sufficient such that air is not drawn into capillary tubing 524 during the measurement. The fluid level in reservoir 512, at the initiation of the measurement, should be approximately 2 mm below the top surface of fritted disc in fritted funnel 518. This can be confirmed by placing a small drop of fluid on the fritted disc and

gravimetrically monitoring its slow flow back into reservoir 512. This level should not change significantly when piston/cylinder assembly 520 is positioned within funnel 518. The reservoir should have a sufficiently large diameter (e.g., ~14 cm) so that withdrawal of ~40 ml portions results in a change in the fluid height of less than 3 mm.

Prior to measurement, the assembly is filled with deionized water. The fritted disc in fritted funnel 518 is forward flushed so that it is filled with fresh deionized water. To the extent possible, air bubbles are removed from the bottom surface of the fritted disc and the system that connects the funnel to the reservoir. The following procedures are carried out by sequential operation of the 3-way stopcocks:

1. Excess fluid on the upper surface of the fritted disc is removed (e.g. poured) from fritted funnel 518.
2. The solution height/weight of reservoir 512 is adjusted to the proper level/value.
3. Fritted funnel 518 is positioned at the correct height relative to reservoir 512.
4. Fritted funnel 518 is then covered with fritted funnel cover 522.
5. The reservoir 512 and fritted funnel 518 are equilibrated with valves 528 and 540 of stopcock assemblies 526 and 538 in the open connecting position.
6. Valves 528 and 540 are then closed.
7. Valve 540 is then turned so that the funnel is open to the drain tube 544.
8. The system is allowed to equilibrate in this position for 5 minutes.
9. Valve 540 is then returned to its closed position.

Steps Nos. 7-9 temporarily "dry" the surface of fritted funnel 518 by exposing it to a small hydrostatic suction of ~5 cm. This suction is applied if the open end of tube 544 extends ~5 cm below the level of the fritted disc in fritted funnel 518 and is filled with deionized water. Typically ~0.04 g of fluid is drained from the system during this procedure. This procedure prevents premature absorption of deionized water when piston/cylinder assembly 520 is positioned within fritted funnel 518. The quantity of fluid that drains from the fritted funnel in this procedure (referred to as the fritted funnel correction weight, or "W_{ffc}") is measured by conducting the PUP test (see below) for a time period of 20 minutes without piston/cylinder assembly 520. Essentially all of the fluid drained from the fritted funnel by this procedure is very quickly reabsorbed by the funnel when the test is initiated. Thus, it is necessary to subtract this correction weight from weights of fluid removed from the reservoir during the PUP test (see below).

A round die-cut sample 560 is blotted for approximately 1 second in a petri dish containing approximately 1 g of deionized water and is then immediately placed in cylinder

554. The piston 556 is slid into cylinder 554 and positioned on top of the cleaning pad sample 560. The piston/cylinder assembly 520 is placed on top of the frit portion of funnel 518, the weight 558 is slipped into piston 556, and the top of funnel 518 is then covered with fritted funnel cover 522. After the balance reading is checked for stability, the test is initiated by opening valves 528 and 540 so as to connect funnel 518 and reservoir 512. With auto initiation, data collection commences immediately, as funnel 518 begins to reabsorb fluid.

Data is recorded at intervals over a total time period of approximately 2200 seconds. PUP absorbent capacity is determined as follows:

$$t_{1200} \text{ absorbent capacity (g/g)} = [W_{r(t=0)} - W_{r(t=1200)} - W_{ffc}] / W_{ds}$$

where t_{1200} absorbent capacity is the g/g capacity of the pad after 1200 seconds, $W_{r(t=0)}$ is the weight in grams of reservoir 512 prior to initiation, $W_{r(t=1200)}$ is the weight in grams of reservoir 512 at 1200 seconds after initiation, W_{ffc} is the fritted funnel correction weight and W_{ds} is the dry weight of the cleaning pad sample. The rate of fluid absorbency is also measured during the 1200 second test procedure. From the rate results, the sample pad's average absorbency rate is obtained for the period $t=0$ to $t=1200$ seconds.

B. Squeeze-out

The ability of the cleaning pad to retain fluid when exposed to in-use pressures, and therefor to avoid fluid "squeeze-out", is another important parameter to the present invention. "Squeeze-out" is measured on an entire cleaning pad by determining the amount of fluid that can be blotted from the sample with Whatman filter paper under pressures of 0.25 psi (1.5 kPa). Squeeze-out is performed on a sample that has been saturated to capacity with deionized water via horizontal wicking (specifically, via wicking from the surface of the pad consisting of the scrubbing or surface-contacting layer). (One means for obtaining a saturated sample is described as the Horizontal Gravimetric Wicking method of U.S. application Serial No. 08/542,497 (Dyer et al.), filed October 13, 1995, which is incorporated by reference herein.) The fluid-containing sample is placed horizontally in an apparatus capable of supplying the respective pressures, preferably by using an air-filled bag that will provide evenly distributed pressure across the surface of the sample. The squeeze-out value is reported as the weight of test fluid lost per weight of the wet sample.

What is claimed is:

1. A cleaning implement comprising:
 - a. a handle; and
 - b. a removable cleaning pad having an average absorbency rate of deionized water of not more than 0.5 g/sec, preferably not more than 0.2 g/sec, preferably not more than 0.1 g/sec; and a t₁₂₀₀ absorbent capacity of at least 1 g deionized water per g of the cleaning pad, preferably at least 10 g of deionized water per g of the cleaning pad, preferably at least 20 g of deionized water per g of the cleaning pad.
2. The cleaning implement of Claim 1 characterized in that the removable cleaning pad comprises:
 - i. a scrubbing layer;
 - ii. an absorbent layer; and
 - iii. an optional scrim material.
3. The cleaning implement of Claim 2 characterized in that the scrubbing layer is in direct fluid communication with the absorbent layer.
4. The cleaning implement of Claim 2 or Claim 3 characterized in that the cleaning pad further comprises an attachment layer, and characterized in that the absorbent layer is positioned between the scrubbing layer and the attachment layer; further characterized in that the attachment layer preferably comprises a material that is essentially fluid impervious.
5. The cleaning implement of any of Claims 1 to 4 characterized in that the cleaning pad has a squeeze-out value of not more than 40% at 0.25 psi, preferably not more than 25% at 0.25 psi.
6. The cleaning implement of any of Claims 2 to 5 characterized in that the absorbent layer comprises a superabsorbent material, preferably selected from the group consisting of superabsorbent gelling polymers and hydrophilic polymeric absorbent foams.

7. A cleaning pad having an average absorbency rate of deionized water of not more than 0.5 g/sec, preferably not more than 0.2 g/sec, preferably not more than 0.1 g/sec; and a t_{1200} absorbent capacity of at least 1 g deionized water per g of the cleaning pad, preferably at least 10 g of deionized water per g of the cleaning pad, preferably at least 20 g of deionized water per g of the cleaning pad.
8. The cleaning pad of Claim 7 characterized in that the cleaning pad has a squeeze-out value of not more than 40% at 0.25 psi, preferably not more than 25% at 0.25 psi.
9. The cleaning pad of Claim 7 or Claim 8, the cleaning pad comprising:
- a scrubbing layer;
 - an absorbent layer; and
 - an optional scrim material.
10. The cleaning pad of Claim 9 further comprising an attachment layer for mechanically attaching the cleaning pad to a handle of a cleaning implement, characterized in that the absorbent layer is positioned between the scrubbing layer and the attachment layer.
11. The cleaning pad of Claim 10 characterized in that the absorbent layer comprises a superabsorbent material, preferably selected from the group consisting of superabsorbent gelling polymers and hydrophilic polymeric absorbent foams.
12. A method for cleaning a hard surface using low levels of a cleaning solution, the method comprising:
- applying the cleaning solution to the hard surface to be cleaned at a level of not more than 6 ml of cleaning solution per square foot of hard surface; and
 - wiping the hard surface with a cleaning implement comprising:
 - a handle; and
 - a removable cleaning pad having a t_{1200} absorbent capacity of at least 1 g deionized water per g of the cleaning pad, preferably at least 10 g/g, preferably at least 20 g/g.
13. A method of cleaning a surface comprising wiping the surface with the cleaning implement of any of Claims 1 to 11.

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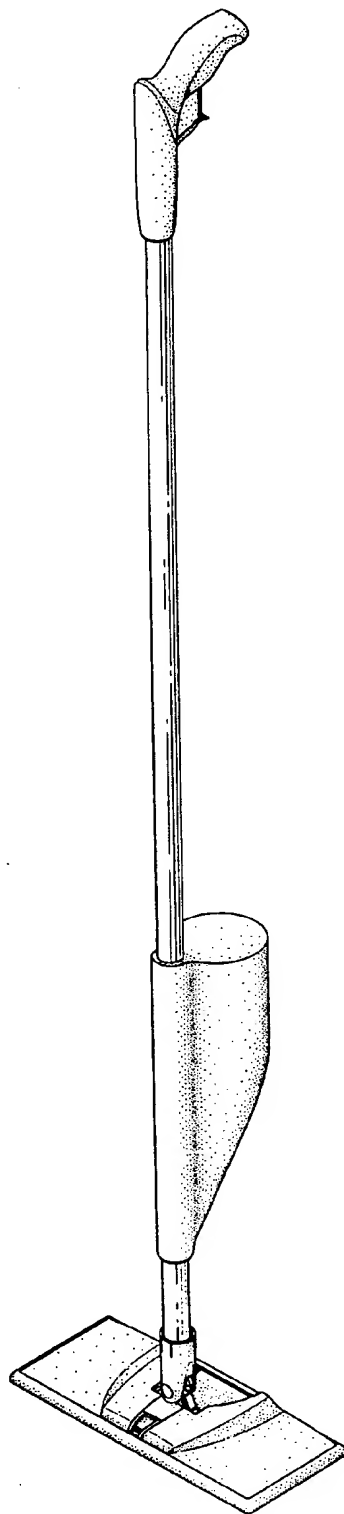


Fig. 1a

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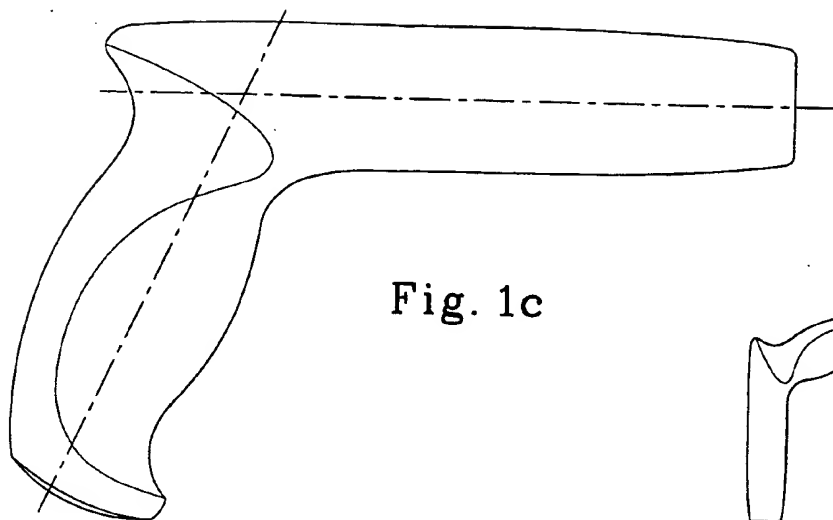


Fig. 1c

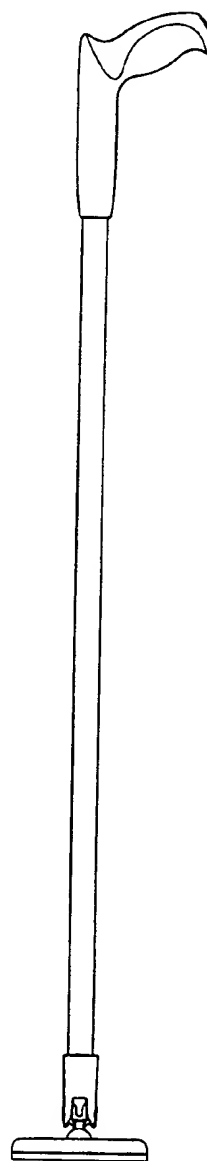


Fig. 1b

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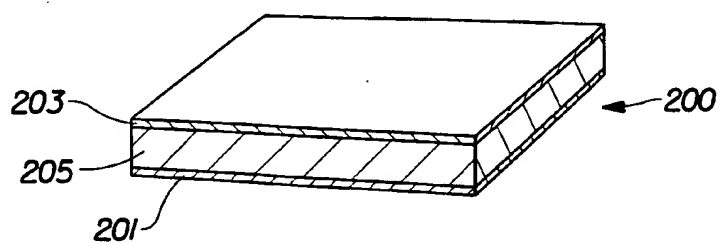


Fig. 2

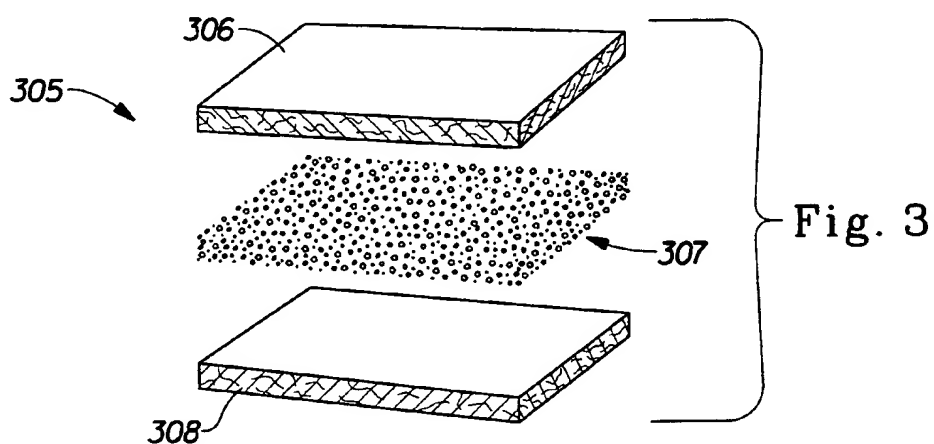


Fig. 3

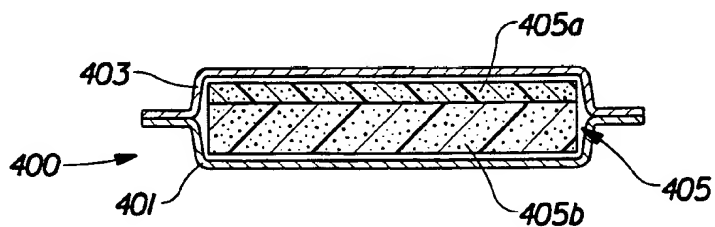


Fig. 4

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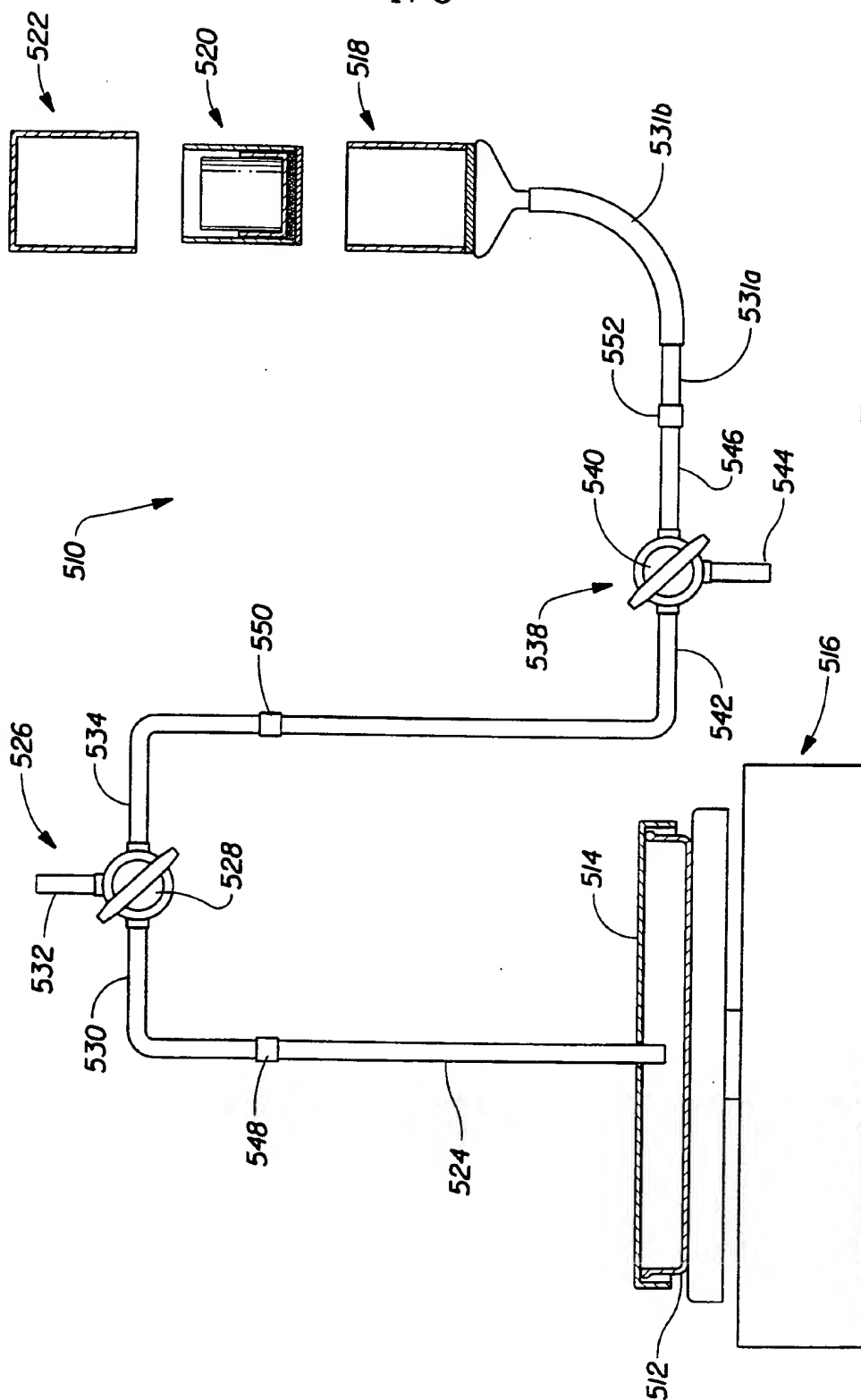


Fig. 5

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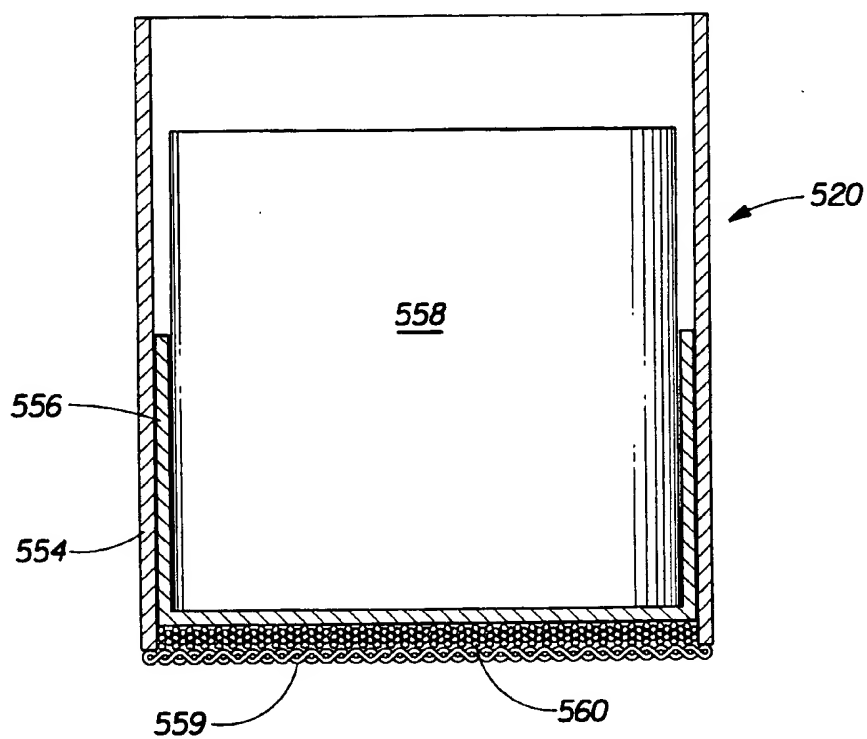


Fig. 6

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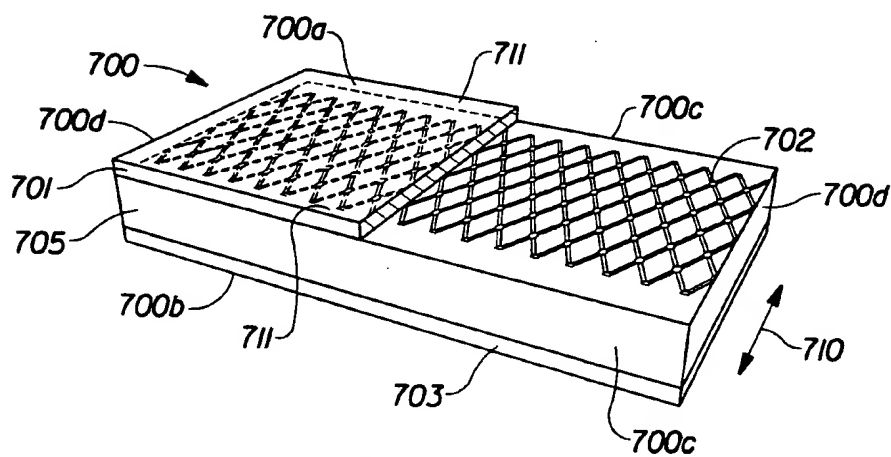
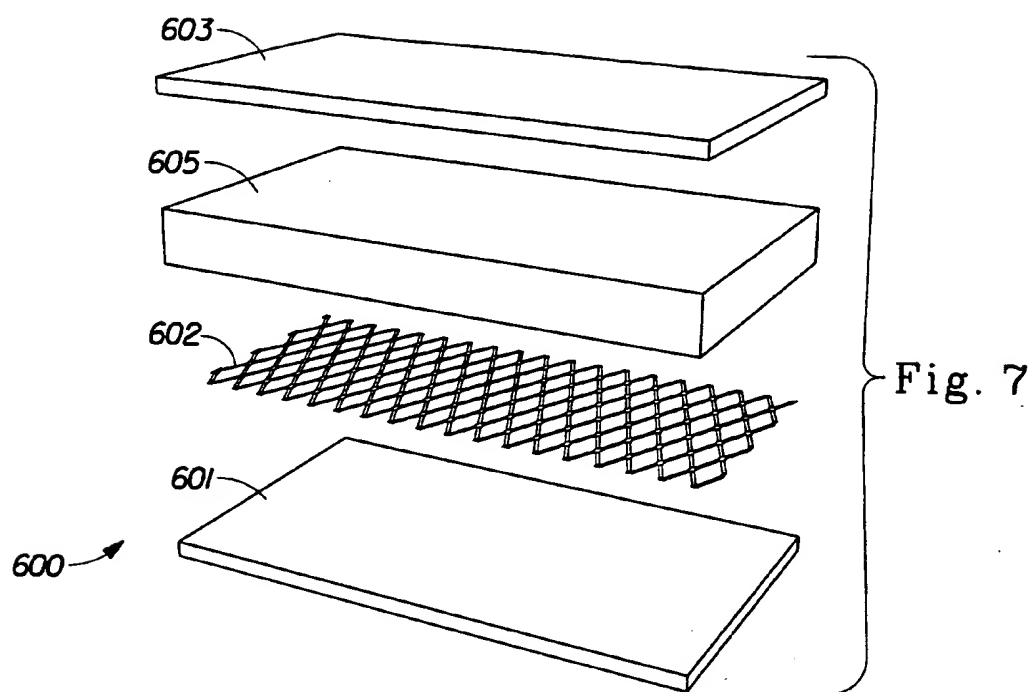


Fig. 8

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/US 97/21567

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 6 A47L13/16

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 6 A47L

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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| A | US 3 761 991 A (MOSS, T.V.) 2 October 1973 see column 2, line 45 - column 3, line 27; figures 1-5 --- | 1,3,9 |
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☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

24 March 1998

Date of mailing of the international search report

02/04/1998

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/US 97/21567

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

| Category | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages | Relevant to claim No. |
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